



Crucial Updates on Prisoners of Conscience in Pakistan and Algeria

Jubilee Campaign wishes a very happy holiday season to you and your family, and we hope that you will find a way to celebrate safely with your loved ones.

In the week leading up to Christmas, we will be updating you on Jubilee Campaign's biggest projects of 2021 and the various successes we made in the realm of international religious freedom. For the first time in over a year, we were able to meet with our colleagues in person at the inaugural IRF Summit in Washington, D.C., where we planned future advocacy initiatives, held an event, and made new friends and partners. We are fully prepared and excited to bring our advocacy plans to fruition in 2022!

Pakistan - Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel

Pictured Below: Shafqat Emmanuel and his wife Shagufta Kausar

As we have already announced in previous email newsletters, Pakistani Christian prisoners of conscience Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel were finally acquitted of their blasphemy charges and released from prison after seven grueling years on death row on a single false accusation. The couple could have acquired freedom via appeal as early as April 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic caused their hearing to be postponed multiple times.



Years ago in 2013, a local Muslim cleric accused Shafqat and Shagufta of sending blasphemous text messages in English. Despite numerous dubious details surrounding the allegations - such as the fact that the couple are illiterate in their own language let alone English, that the phone from which the blasphemous remarks were allegedly sent was not produced for examination, and that the couple had had a prior argument with the accuser that may have emboldened him to seek revenge via accusations of blasphemy - the couple was swiftly tried and sentenced to death.

Thanks to the advocacy of numerous religious freedom and human rights organizations across the world, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), and even the parliament of the European Union, Shafqat and Shagufta's case gained traction and they were finally able to secure reprieve. They have since safely resettled to a third country.

Pakistan - Stephan Masih



Jubilee Campaign has been working on the case of Pakistani Christian convert Stephan Masih who has been kept in prolonged pre-trial detention since March 2019. Masih was having an argument with his relatives and made some rude remarks towards a neighbor woman; the woman left but later returned with her husband, a Muslim cleric, who warned Masih that he would come back tomorrow with a mob of his peers and that he would accuse Masih of committing blasphemy. The next day, while the angry mom physically assaulted Masih, authorities arrived only to arrest Masih for alleged blasphemy rather than detaining his assailants.

Masih's family has been campaigning for his acquittal and release on account of his mental disability. In March 2020, a medical examination board was convened to review Masih's mental health after four months of pressure from the family. In 2021, after a whole year of withholding the medical results, the Punjab Institute of Mental Health released the findings only after Masih's lawyers and Voice for Justice pressured them to do so. The results concluded that Masih suffers from Bipolar Affective Disorder which affects his judgement and behavior, and that he is unfit to stand trial; Still, Masih remains imprisoned and is denied medical treatment. Masih's appeal hearing took place on 29 November 2021, and the Judge permitted his lawyers to begin necessary preparations of documents to apply for bail in mid-December.

Pakistan - Nadeem Samson

Jubilee Campaign has also been involved with Shakeel Samson, the brother of Pakistani Christian convert Nadeem Samson who has been imprisoned since 2017 on false blasphemy charges. The two accusers, Abdul Huq and Sakhawat, alleged that Samson had a personal Facebook account from which he posted blasphemous remarks. Interestingly, Samson had had a prior dispute with his two accusers regarding the return of a financial deposit that was not returned to Samson after he stayed in the home of Huq for a period of time. It is believed that Huq had registered a fake Facebook account under the name and public phone number of Samson from which he then posted blasphemous statements he could later accuse Samson of making.



During Samson's initial time in detention, authorities physically tortured him to extract a false confession, and he now resides in Lahore District Jail where he is relegated to a tiny prison cell which is sometimes filled over capacity. In January 2021, Samson's brother reported that his lawyer was supposed to visit the High Court to request bail the month prior; it is unclear whether the attorney visited the court at all to file the bail request or if the bail request was filed but immediately rejected by the court. By June, an appeal was filed on behalf of Samson to the Supreme Court.

Pakistan - Sajjad Masih Gill

In November 2021, it was reported that Pakistani Christian convert Sajjad Masih Gill had been acquitted of blasphemy charges due to insufficient evidence. In December 2011, Gill was accused of sending disrespectful text messages about the prophet Muhammad; authorities swiftly arrested him and he was sentenced to life in prison despite that authorities could find no evidence of such messages on his phone, and despite that the original accuser retracted his allegations towards Gill. Gill spent nearly a decade in prison and in March 2021, his appeal had the opposite of intended results; the court had



accepted the prosecution's argument that Gill should receive the death penalty. However, we are now relieved to learn that Gill has been acquitted and freed.

Algeria: Hamid Soudad

Hamid Soudad was arrested in January 2021 for a cartoon of the prophet Muhammad that he shared three years earlier in 2018; without access to either a lawyer or a fair trial, an Oran court sentenced Soudad to the maximum five years in prison for blasphemy. Just a few months later, the Oran City Court denied Soudad's appeal and upheld his original sentence, and he is currently serving time in prison. Farid Khemisti, Soudad's lawyer, believes that the authorities targeted Soudad specifically because he is a Christian. Firstly, Soudad received charges an entire three years after he posted alleged blasphemous cartoon. Secondly, Algerian authorities usually apply milder prison sentences to individuals who shared blasphemous posts and harsher sentences to the authors and artists of such posts; Soudad did not create the cartoon, he merely shared it, and yet he received the maximum sentence.

Jubilee Campaign submitted a joint letter with numerous other human rights and religious freedom advocacy organizations and activists - including Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett of the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights - to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Our letter urged the Special Rapporteur to call for Soudad's immediate acquittal and release from prison.

Suleiman Bouhaf's

Suleiman Bouhaf's is an Algerian Christian who was originally arrested and charged with "harming the image of the Prophet" and "offending Islam" for Facebook posts in which he criticized Islam. Bouhaf's was not provided legal counsel and was swiftly sentenced to three years in prison for blasphemy. In 2018, however, Bouhaf's received a presidential pardon and escaped to neighboring Tunisia to escape persecution. However, after three years of living relatively securely in Tunisia, Bouhaf's went missing for a few days before he reappeared in Algeria. It is believed that Algerian authorities cooperated with Tunisian authorities to illegally repatriate Bouhaf's to his home country where he is facing charges of terrorism - for his membership in a self-determination organization - as well as blasphemy once again. Jubilee Campaign recently sent a letter calling on the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to intervene in Bouhaf's case and securely resettle him and his family to a safe third country.

Jubilee Campaign Newsletter: Prisoners of Conscience Updates

Prisoners of Conscience Updates

SHAGUFTA KAUSAR & SHAFQAT EMMANUEL

At the outset of 2021 the international religious freedom community was disheartened to hear in February that the appeal hearing of Pakistani Christian couple Shagufta Kausar (52) and Shafqat Emmanuel (49) was postponed indefinitely. Already, the couple had been imprisoned for seven years after they were convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death in 2014 for allegedly sending blasphemous text messages in English to a mosque cleric. In 2013, complainant Muhammad Hussain claimed that he received two blasphemous text messages from a cellphone registered in Shagufta's name. Without a proper investigation, and despite that the phone with the SIM Card in Shagufta's name was never recovered, the couple was swiftly arrested and charged with "insulting the Quran" and "insulting the Prophet" before they were transferred to separate prisons to carry out their sentence.



'It's unfortunate that innocent people are forced to rot in jails for years on false accusations of blasphemy. This practice needs to stop now. The charge is so serious that even judges are fearful of conducting hearings and giving decisions on merit.'

SAIF UL MALOOK
(SHAGUFTA AND SHAFQAT'S ATTORNEY)

Pictured Left: Shafqat Emmanuel (left) and Shagufta Kausar (right) after reuniting in 2021

This harsh sentencing was levied despite the myriad dubious details of the case – such as that the couple was both illiterate and unable to speak or write English and therefore would not be able to send the alleged messages, and that the couple had a previous dispute with their accuser and the allegations could have been an act of retaliation or revenge. One of the couple's lawyers, Nadeem Hassan, has stated that police authorities extracted a coerced confession from Shafqat by physically torturing him and threatening to do the same to his wife. During the couple's time in separate prisons, Shafqat's health deteriorated rapidly, already paralyzed from the waist down from an unrelated accident, he received no mobility assistance or medical treatment.

Shafqat's and Shagufta's appeal hearing was originally set to be heard in April 2020, but was initially pushed back due to the COVID-19 pandemic; the court further deferred the case twice in 2021, citing that the court hours had already closed for the day on those two occasions. Fortunately, the Lahore High Court of Pakistan heard the couple's appeal in June 2021, acquitted Shagufta and Shafqat of their charges, and ordered their immediate release. Now, we are pleased to announce that the couple has safely resettled in a European country, as they would have likely faced harassment, intimidation, and possibly even violence from Pakistan's radical Muslim community who was angered by their release.

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